handling the situation created by the new economic policies sweeping the world;

(b) whether the External Affairs Ministry is capable of facing the changed atmosphere in the world both on political and economic front;

(c) how many vacancies of Ambassadors and 1st Secretaries are lying vacant and since when;

(d) how many of the Indian Ambassadors are from the IFS, IAS and Political background; and

(e) what steps Government propose to take to further improve our relations with the neighbouring and leading countries of the world ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SALMAN KHURSHEED) : (a) The Government has taken a number of measures to give a new economic orientation to India's foreign policy and to reorient the priorities of our Missions to that special emphasis is placed on promoting our economic and commercial interests. Specific measures taken in this regard include :

(1) An Economic Coordination Unit (ECU) has been set up within the Ministry of External Affairs. Different divisions in the Ministry in association with ECU and Missions abroad are taking steps to understand and assimilate changes that are taking place in the global situation on a systematic basis and to modulate our foreign policy responses in such a manner that India's economic interests are maximised.

(2) Clear-cut instructions have been issued to our Missions abroad to accord top priority to attracting foreign investment, securing access to required technologies, aggressively promoting our exports and ensuring continued flow of financial resources on concessional terms from bilateral and multilateral channels.

(3) A set of target Missions have been identified from the standpoint of our investment promotion efforts.

(4) A Comprehensive, composite publicity package has been prepared aimed at disseminating information about the new economic policies and projecting India as an investment destination.

(5) With a view to enhancing functional efficiency of our Missions an effort has been made to undertake extensive computerisation.

(6) Several promotional events have been organised both abroad as well as in India to project the country as an attractive investment destination.

(b) Yes Sir.

(c) and (d) As per Statement enclosed (*See below*)

(e) The Govt. would continue its allround efforts to promote economic and political relations with neighbouring and leading countries of the world.

Statement

(c) Of the 110 Ambassador level posts in various Missions abroad, 4 are lying vacant (E/I, Belgrade since 1-1-92, E/I, Paramaribo since 9-10-92, E/I, Abidjan since 14-6-93 and HCI, Wellington since 5-8-93).

Other than Ambassadors, there are various diplomatic posts of Minister/Counsellor/First Secretary/Second Secretary/Third Secretary which are promptly filled through regular meetings of the Foreign Service Board. Vacancies in these categories are generally only due to logistical and administrative reasons when there is a gap between the successor leaving and the replacement joining.

(d) Of the 110 Ambassador level posts, 12 are political appointees, 1 is an IAS officer and the rest are all from Indian Foreign Service.

Hardship Faced by Indians in Getting Visas to Malaysia

2783. SHRI MURLIDHAR CHANDRAKANT BHANDARE : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government are aware of the hardships and the delay experienced by Indian citizens in getting Visas to Malaysia; and

(b) if so, what steps are being taken to remove these hardships and in expediting the grant of Visas ?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DINESH SINGH) : (a) Yes, Sir. This matter has engaged the attention of the Government for the past 7 months.

(b) It has been taken up with the Malaysian Government at the level of Foreign Minister to streamline their visa regulations, not only in the interest of trade and business relations but also to prevent harassment genuine visa seekers. Malaysian Government have agreed to give positive consideration to our concerns.